Connally Remembers

House Unit Relives Tragedy of Dallas

Bulletin Wire Services

Washington — The film is silent. The open-top limousine is moving along the sunlit street, the crowds waving, the young smiling couple in the back seat.

Then the young man lurches forward, clutching toward his throat, and the woman in the pillbox hat holds him and there is blood and anguish. In the darkness of the Congressional Hearing Room it is Dallas, Tex., 1963.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations, using the film of an amateur photographer, Abraham Zapruder, verbal reports of its staff members, and the often emotional testimony of former Texas Gov. John Connally and his wife, yesterday reconstructed the death of President John F. Kennedy.

It is a story no American over 30 has not lived with and one that many know by heart, yet in the retelling there was again that sense of tragedy that came across the land 15 years ago.

Connally, often dabbing his eyes with a handerchief and pausing for gulps of water, gave his own emotional report in a morning session. His wife, Nellie, filled in the moments when he blacked out.

The Connallys sat in jump seats in front of the Kennedys on that fatal drive.

They agreed there were three shots from behind and to the right of the limousine — a direction pointing to the Texas School Book Depository from where Lee Harvey Oswald is said to have fired.

Mrs. Connally recalled to the committee: "I heard a noise. I didn't think of it as a gunshot . . . I looked in back and saw the president clutch his neck with both hands . . . He said nothing but slumped down in his seat . . ."

The next to be shot, she said, was her husband, riding next to her in the jump seat. When she realized the shot had made him "totally defenseless" she pulled him down to her lap.

"The only thing I could think of to do was to pull him down out of the line of fire. I thought if I pulled him down maybe they wouldn't hurt him any

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more," she said.

At this point, Mrs. Connally recalled, Mrs. Kennedy said: "They have shot my husband . . . They have killed my husband . . . I have his brains in my hand."

Less than one hour later Kennedy was pronounced dead at Parkland Memorial Hospital.

Connally insisted, as he had in the past, that he had not been struck by the same bullet that hit Kennedy in the throat. One bullet, the Warren Commission said, hit both Kennedy and Connally, one bullet shattered Kennedy's skull and was probably the shot that killed him, and a third round missed.

"I heard that shot," Connally said of the one that inflicted a nonfatal wound on the president. He explained the speed of the bullet would have made it impossible for him to hear the shot that hit him in the shoulder, arm, wrist, lung and leg.

But he could not explain the discrepancy. "I wish I could believe that all the speculation and all the rumors could be dispelled," Connally said. "I don't believe that . . . Some circumstances are incapable of being solved."

The committee also summoned Warren Commission critic Robert Groden, a New Jersey photo-optical technician, to describe the major questions raised by hundreds of photos of the assassination scene.

Groden noted that in the Zapruder film, Kennedy appears to have been forced backward by the impact of the second shot. Groden said this raises the question of whether the shot was fired from the grassy knoll in front of the motorcade.

Groden spelled out these further questions suggested by an array of other photos:

— Who was the mysterious figure who appears in two photos to be hiding behind a retaining wall on the grassy knoll?

— Is there any significance to the "umbrella man" who appears in a film of the crowd, raising an umbrella as Kennedy's car approached, although it was not raining, twirling the umbrella and lowering it as Kennedy was shot?

— What was the long, slim object protruding from an open doorway in a building across the street from the school book depository? Was it a rifle?

— Who was the man photographed in the doorway of the depository at the time of the shooting? Groden said the man resembled Oswald, but if he were Oswald, he could not have been on the sixth floor firing the shots.

AP Photo

Mrs. John B. Connally recalls President Kennedy's assassination
"I . . . saw the President clutch his neck with both hands"